

“The Helmet of Salvation” (Ephesians 6:10-20)
Pastor John Bronson

March 6, 2011

Order of Worship for March 6th, Communion Sunday
Pre-service Song
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: (None)

Call to Worship: Psalm 73:1-17 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“He is Here”	Song # 220
“How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”	Overhead
“Christ Alone”	Overhead
“And Can It Be?”	Song # 347

Offering and Offertory

The Lord’s Supper

Preparing the heart in song: “Power of the Cross”	Overhead
Invitation and Prayer of Dedication	
Dedication and distribution of the Elements	

Song of Thanksgiving: “There is a Redeemer”	Song # 308
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Message: “The Helmet of Salvation” (Ephesians 6:10-20)
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “Amazing Grace”	Song # 343
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Parting Word of Grace

Evening Studies in the Word
Hebrews 5:11-6:8
5:00 – 7:30 pm
The Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

March 6, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Russel and Sharla Weisner serving in Malaysia:** that the Spirit will enable them to be safe havens of peace amidst the turmoil of the Islamic world; that the distinctive goodness of Christ will be apparent in all their actions; that the volunteer teaching team will demonstrate the love of God to the English language students
2. **President Obama:** that the Spirit will give him clarity that God loves him and will guide him as well as protecting him and his family; that the Spirit will give him discernment to see evil for what it really is; that the Spirit will open his understanding to the strength of honesty and humility
3. **The Oroville Christian School Board:** that they will enjoy the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; that they will draw wisdom and direction from the Lord; that they will communicate strength and blessing to faculty, administration and parents of students
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Sgt. Jonathan Sweetman** (son of Catherine, brother of Bethany Sweetman):
5. **College Student of the Week: Danielle Sands at California Baptist College** (daughter of Stephanie Sands):

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Today we are talking about the helmet of salvation, and if you have not yet done so, I encourage you to open your Bible to Ephesians 6. I do appreciate the number of you who have come to me and said thanks for taking the time not to rush through this passage. That puts the shame on the many of you who have said, “Are we never going to get done!”

What sustains you for the long haul? What enables you to keep going? I am a runner, as many of you know. I try to run three times a week. Invariably I start running and not too long after I have started I ask myself, “Why am I doing this again?” I am not one of those runners that just gets all excited and loves to be out there running. [Perhaps] I run because I am a masochist [that] loves to put his body through pain! [Actually] I just know that to maintain my good health that is what I need to do, so I run. But I always debate whether I want to continue doing it when I am doing it.

The seriousness of the question is perhaps driven home to us when we remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “. . .*the one who endures to the end will be saved.*” I am not sure that we actually take that statement seriously. We are given to the notion of saying, “No, the one who at some time or other accepted Jesus is saved.” That is true. But so is this. The answer [reconciling these] is, the one who at sometime or other actually accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior will endure to the end. So the question in the meantime is, “Are we enduring?”

Jesus actually made that very comment, according to Matthew, twice. He made it in Matthew 10:22 and in Matthew 24:13. I am going to read those two passages in succession. You might want to flag them and go back and look at them later. The first statement Jesus made to his select group of disciples, anticipating sending them out on their first mission trip on their own. This is what Jesus said to them:

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak, or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. . . .”

That was the first of the two occasions. The second of the two occasions Jesus is on the Mount of Olives in immediate anticipation of His death and then His resurrection. He gives this to us, to all who would come thereafter.

“As [Jesus] sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Those are the two instances recorded in Matthew when Jesus made that statement, “. . .*those who endure to the end will be saved.*” We are wise to ask ourselves this question: “have we come to the end?” That is a legitimate question.

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If it is true, if we want it to be true, [then] we have to ask this question: “Am I prepared to endure what I will have to go through if this is the end?” Sometimes I hear amongst us great confidence that the rapture will come and... Let me assure you, if you read your scriptures carefully before the rapture occurs, troubles will be huge.

Last week during the class where we talk about the sermon, one of the seasoned saints asked me this, “If the power of Satan has been broken and destroyed, doesn’t it seem, when you look around, as if his power is actually increasing?” That is a fair question. The evidence in the world around us does not give clear or convincing proof of the triumph of life over death. It does not give conclusive proof of the triumph of truth over the lie, or of goodness over evil, or of righteousness and justice over wickedness and oppression. On the contrary the evidence seems to point rather in the opposite direction: the disintegration of the moral culture of the West, the replacement of communism by regimes that are appropriately called “kleptocracies” from the word “klepto” meaning “to steal”, the rapid increase of the power of China which remains an often cruelly oppressive regime politically and especially as regards religious belief. I will mention international terrorism. Many of us could cite more evidence of the increasing chaos and turmoil that is evidence all around us. If you have been watching the news you have watched one regime after another in the Near East fall to pieces; but please understand that behind the collapse of these dictators are years and years of cruel oppression, horrible acts that you and I don’t even want to know about. It is easy for us to misunderstand, perhaps, the affirmation in the Word of God. Death has been defeated at the cross. But don’t ever forget that the power of Satan has not been broken over the world. What the affirmation in John’s statement in I John 5:19 is, is this, “*We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*” It is only those who are set free by Christ who escape the power of Satan. Only those escape.

But even escaping, we [as Christians] still struggle. Who of us hasn’t at times staggered to the point of simply wanting to chuck the whole thing when it comes to standing fast on the truth? Haven’t we at times wanted to simply give up and stop saying “no”, no to temptation? Or [haven’t we] said, “I am not going to try any more to extend not just the words of God’s invitation, but also the spirit of the gospel to my neighbors. My neighbors constantly say no to me, they refuse the offer, they don’t want to be my friends, they don’t want the gospel, they don’t want to know Christ, they don’t want to know the way of peace; they don’t want to know the way of life. I am sick to death, I am tired, I am going to...” Did you ever feel that way? Remember, Jesus said that as the end of the age approaches, the love of many will grow cold. Will ours? That is the temptation. “I am going to stop caring for anybody but my little group!”

This is not theoretical. I think most know that. But recognize that coming to this point of exhaustion, the draining away of our compassions, puts us very close to Psalm 73. Asaph who wrote the psalm was very much in this frame of mind. Notice again what he said, starting and v. 2.

“But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. [On the internet I saw a website inviting you to look inside a sixty million dollar house! There is a billionaire in India that has a 27 storey tall house! That does not excite my envy.] For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment... They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth... And they say, “How can God know? Is their knowledge in the Most High?” Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning...” (vv. 2-14)

It is good for us that the psalmist did not stop there. He walked just a little further and said, “*If I had said, I will act on those feelings (paraphrasing), I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I saw the end.*” The Psalmist endured to the end. How did he endure to the end? [He did so] by remembering future judgment, that is how he endured. It will not always be thus; it will change.

Now that is a very important piece of information, very encouraging. As most of you know I am reluctant to preach much in the area of prophecy. I am because these portions of Scripture are so easily misused and therefore misunderstood. We need to hear Jesus’ warnings. As we hear Paul’s words of comfort we will take to heart Paul’s clear but sometimes forgotten application of the truth about to the end. To do this please turn to 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12. We will read through those verses and then I will make some comments about the verses. This is what Paul writes to the Thessalonians: it is all about the end.

- (v.3) *“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.*
- (v.4) *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.*
- (v.5) *This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—*
- (v.6) *since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,*
- (v.7) *and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels*
- (v.8) *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*
- (v.9) *They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,*
- (v.10) *when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*
- (v.11) *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,*
- (v.12) *so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Now what did he say in that passage? If we look at the third verse the third verse makes good sense to us. It is surely right to give thanks for faithful and loving people: *“We...always...give thanks to God for you, brothers...because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is...increasing.”* That is a good, sensible statement. Verse 4 makes good sense to us as well. It is surely right to boast about, or at least to admire, people who are steadfast amidst persecution and affliction. At verse 5, however, we begin to walk into a different kind of territory. At v. 5 Paul refers to the evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and we are not certain what that judgment is for he hasn’t made any mention of it so far. Secondly, in addition to making a reference to righteous judgment and the evidence of it, Paul makes this statement; he says we are to be considered worthy, that is, we may be considered worthy of the kingdom for which we are suffering. I think it is fairly common for us to consider, and surely we have been taught, that all this question of being worthy was taken care of at the cross. Punishment is removed and we are cleansed of every stain of sin and therefore surely we are worthy of the kingdom. Aren’t we? Well, either the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has gotten something wrong here, or perhaps we need to rethink or refine our understanding of these matters. Let me share with you a verse referred to earlier [in the service]. John wrote this wonderful affirmation in **I John 1:9**, *“...God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.”* But that is not the verse! This is the verse: *“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.”* What if we don’t confess? John does not say what happens if we don’t confess. I don’t advise taking any comfort from the fact that John says nothing because it is perfectly obvious that the point of the verse is that we will confess! So consequently, if in our walk of faith with God we do not confess, what are we to expect? What do we call that? We call it “disobedience”, and disobedience is always rooted in a lack of faith, always, and it embodies the

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withering away of love. In verse 11 of I Thessalonians I, Paul writes this: *“we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of His calling...”*

Returning to the passage, we look at verse 6, and there we learn that there is a future judgment when God will afflict those who at the present time afflict the saints. I have stumbled over this passage many times. It just seems like, O man, how can this possibly be a description of the loving God that I serve? What Paul says is, *“...God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you...”* That goes right along with what he says in Romans 12, (paraphrasing) “Don’t ever take vengeance for yourself, leave vengeance to God; he’ll do it!”

Then there is also in that verse the promise of future relief. He goes on in verse 7, *“and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us...”* When does that relief come? That relief comes when Jesus returns. At that time, when Jesus returns, he sends the unbelieving to eternal destruction. At that time Jesus is glorified in the saints. It is then that Jesus establishes his kingdom upon the earth, and it is for that kingdom that Paul prays, according to verse 11, that those to whom he writes will be worthy.

They will be worthy, he says, for they are to fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith, and they are to do it by the Lord’s power. We sang about this last week. We sang the song “Learning to Lean on Jesus.” It is not, beloved, enough to be forgiven. Being forgiven is the beginning of the journey, and you, of course, if you are like me, need to be refreshed with [forgiveness] now and then. But it is not enough. We must endure to the end. Paul’s application is that we endure to the end by learning to lean on Jesus. The question that arises is therefore, what is your personal relationship with Jesus? Are you leaning on Him? Do you draw strength from Him? Do you draw wisdom from Him?

I am reading a book on prayer right now. It is the most challenging book on prayer I have ever read. When the Puritans talked about prayer what they said was that it is hard work. I am discovering, in ways I have not known up till this time in my life, it is hard work. Because I need to consistently keep my focus on Jesus, and I have to ask the Spirit of God to bring to continuous remembrance what I know about Jesus Christ, so that it is the purposes of God that fill my mind when I think of any one of you and put you before the throne of grace that God might fulfill His purpose in your life. It is easy for me to sleep. It is easy for me to drift. And it is hard for me to let no other voice speak into my mind, but to let only the voice of the Spirit of God bring back the remembrance of His Word, that you might be blessed, not from my random thoughts, but through His remembered truth! It is hard work. I wonder if I will meet my end on my knees because I endure.

Beloved, the journey of faith is a long one, and it can become very wearisome. When we grow tired, when faith in us grows faint, when the eyes of the heart begin to fail, we need to recall not just the individual promises by which we counter the thrusts and stabs of the deceiver, and therefore we need the shield of faith, which is what we spoke of last week. We need to remember in addition the final end, the destination which defines the journey that we are on. We have no right, understand, we have no right, no claim on Jesus Christ at all that we should enjoy days of peace to our end! That is a sweet benefit of His gracious goodness that comes to us out of His immensely good heart. But beloved we are no more worthy of His goodness than the Iraqi Christian who suffers constantly day after day after day and lives in fear of death all the time! We should be in front of God, praising Him and saying, “Thank-you for the days of peace! Thank-you for the days of prosperity! Thank-you for the freedom with which I can speak! Thank-you for the freedom with which I can worship. Thank-you that I can walk in this country and not walk in constant fear, because there are millions who walk in constant fear. Who will endure to the end? I have spoken of the deceiver. He will be glad to have you walk in days of peace as long as you are blind. He will secure for you prosperity if you are blind, so that you step over the threshold into the horror of truth long suppressed in unrighteousness. Don’t let it happen.

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When all else was lost, Job could still say, and did say, “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.*” That affirmation is called “conviction”. This is the helmet of salvation. I Corinthians 15:32, Paul said, “*What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*” Already he had written to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:19), “*If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*” Beloved, the credibility of the Christian faith is not found in worldly success; it is found in godly character, in the supernaturally grounded love, joy and peace which are ours in Christ. Those are the measures. By His grace we will endure to the end.

Let us pray: We call upon you now our Father in the name of Your Son, who endured to the end – and O are we glad that He did! For He bore upon Himself the whole weight of our iniquities and took away from us the whole weight of our guilt and our shame, and has given to us His life to be lived in us through His Spirit. So may we, Father, be industrious, disciplined, devoted to find our comfort and our strength and our wisdom in Christ. It is, Father, in His name, and for His name’s sake in the world that we pray. Amen.

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Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you think we are at the end of the age of grace, and if so, what do you think it will take to endure until the Lord returns?

2. Why does the Lord let evil increase as the age comes to its end?

3. What most encourages and what most discourages you in the life of faith these days? Is the reality of God's future judgment real to you and does it encourage you to present faithfulness?

4. How is the study of prophecy most often misused and misunderstood?

5. What does it mean to be worthy of God's kingdom and is this a matter of concern for Christians?

6. According to 2Thessalonians 1:3-12, when are Christians to expect relief in the spiritual war?

7. If forgiveness is only the beginning of the journey of faith, what comes after it?

8. Why is the resurrection of believers so important to the Christian?

9. Does it seem to you that most Christians today live according to what Paul said in 1Corinthians 15:32?